The Melville Society

NEWSLETTER

JUNE, 1951

Volume VII Number 2

President Howard P. Vincent has just announced plans for a three-day conference of Melville scholars and other interested persons to observe the "one hundredth birthday party" of **Moby-Dick** at Williams College on September 2-4. Its general theme will be **"Moby-Dick** and the America of 1851."

An unusual array of stimulating speakers and panel members is promised, including Charles R. Anderson, Newton Arvin, Richard Chase, Luther S. Mansfield, Perry Miller, Henry A. Murray, Harrison Hayford, Henry Nash Smith, Randall Stewart, Willard Thorp, and Howard Vincent. In addition, there will be interesting exhibits of Melville materials both at the Williams College Library and at the Berkshire Athenaeum. President James Phinney Baxter III of Williams will greet the conferees at the Sunday evening dinner session. The staff of the **Berkshire Evening Eagle** has arranged for a tour of the Pittsfield area, where Melville lived and wrote for thirteen years.

All expenses of the conference, including rooms and meals (beginning Sunday afternoon and ending Tuesday afternoon), are covered by the modest registration fee of only fifteen dollars. This has been made possible by the generosity of Williams College in providing dormitory rooms and catering service.

Those planning to attend (and who will be able to resist?) should write immediately to Professor Luther S. Mansfield, Melville Conference, Williams College, Williamstown, Massachusetts. Enclose your check or money order for the registration fee. No reservations will be accepted after August first.

The conference has been scheduled at a time when the Berkshire Hills are at their loveliest. Those desiring to attend the English Institute, which meets at Columbia University later in the same week, will find it convenient to take part in both events.

Here is an opportunity which no one interested in Melville should overlook!

MELVILLE AND THE BOOKSELLERS

Browsing through early volumes of **American Book-Prices Current** is an extremely fascinating, occasionally rewarding, and—for present-day Melville collectors—thoroughly harrowing experience. It is, of course, no news that pre-World War I booksellers and buyers were uninterested in Melville. But here are a few of the grim particulars:

On December 17, 1894, the library of the late William Walton was sold for $2,634.57. Contributing to this amount was the sale of four Melville first American editions **(Omoo, Mardi, Moby-Dick,** and **The Confidence-Man)** for a total sum of $8.13.

On May 24, 1897, seven American firsts **(Typee, Omoo, Mardi, Redburn, Moby-Dick, Pierre,** and **Israel Potter)** were sold in a lot for $12.00.

In 1901, a copy of **Timoleon** with the the author's signature fetched $6.50. A dozen years later the same copy was resold for $7.80.

In 1906, six American firsts **(Mardi, Redburn, White-Jacket, Moby-Dick, Pierre,** and **The Confidence-Man)** brought a total of $5.25.

In 1914, a **Moby-Dick** first went for $3.00.

Some of the entries prove especially interesting to the scholar. There are, for example, references to MS. letters, some inserted into books (see **ABPC,** 1905, 1911, 1922, 1924). One book—a presentation copy of **John Marr and Other Sailors**—is mentioned as containing Melville's MS. corrections (See **ABPC, 1913).**

—Benjamin Lease

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Howard Hugh Schless is continuing at Yale a study, previously begun, of Melville and Dante.

The Viking Press plans to publish, possibly in the fall, a **Portable Herman Melville,** not including **Moby-Dick,** edited by Jay Leyda.

Newton Arvin's biography of Melville was given the National Book Award for the outstanding book of non-fiction published in 1950. The

award, sponsored by the book industry, was made in New York on March 6.

"The Town-Ho's Story" appears in **Short Stories,** edited by Ferguson, Blaine, and Dumble. This is a textbook published by the Dryden Press for $1.25.

Merton Sealts will compile a supplement to his check-list of Melville's books for the winter issue of the **Harvard Library Bulletin.**

Herbert Cahoon's check-list of Melville materials in the New York Public Library is scheduled to appear in the June issue of the library's **Bulletin.** Reprints will be available.

Sidney Kaplan will publish in a forthcoming issue of **Phylon** an article entitled "The **Moby Dick** and the Underground Railroad." According to records of the former Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation and of the Custom House at Boston, now in the National Archives, as well as the records of the Marine Museum of the Bostonian Society, the schooner **Moby Dick** was built at Boston in 1852. The first record of ownership known to Kaplan is June 23, 1852. These facts correct the impression given by Walter Harding's recent article, ("A Note on the Title 'Moby-Dick'," **American Literature,** XXII, 500-501, January 1951) that Melville may have been acquainted with the vessel or its name before 1851. Harding's suggestion is based upon an apparent error in a passage which he quotes from Wilbur H. Siebert, **The Underground Railroad in Massachusetts** (Worcester, 1936). An interesting speculation may now be raised as to whether the schooner was named after Melville's white whale.

"Billy Budd," the Broadway play, closed on Saturday night, May 12, after 105 performances.

William Gilman's **Melville's Early Life and Redburn** (New York University Press) is in the page proof stage, and a publication date will be announced soon.

C. Merton Babcock points out that Melville's expression, "windrowed snows of prairies," from Chapter XLII of **Moby-Dick,** is erroneously credited to W. H. Hudson (1893) in **NEDS.**

According to newspaper reports, at least seven motion picture companies are at present interested in producing "Moby-Dick." They are Argosy Pictures, Bing Crosby Enterprises, Film Group, J. Arthur Rank, David O. Selznick, Edward Small, and Warner Brothers.

Joseph A. Barry, chief of the Paris bureau of the New York Sunday **Times,** has informed Sidney Kaplan that a French production of **Moby-Dick** was running at the Theatre Hebertot (Paris) during the fall of 1949. The French text, which has never been published, was adapted by Paul Oettly.

Melville's **Selected Tales and Poetry,** edited by Richard Chase, has been published by Rinehart and Company at $5.00.

MELVILLE EXPLICATOR

Q. 1. An explication is desired for the word **block** in **Moby-Dick,** I, 71 (Standard Edition): " . . . after disposing of the embalmed head to a barber, for a block, I settled my own and comrade's bill." James M. Purcell, in "Melville's Contribution to English," **PMLA,** LVI, 797-808 (September 1941), assumes that **block** means haircut. No such meaning is listed in the dictionaries. A barber's block for the hanging of wigs is defined in **NED** and **DAE.** Thorp accepts this dictionary definition. **NED** also defines **block** as a hat mold. **EDD** lists the meanings: bargain, bartering, exchange.

Q. 2. Explications are requested for **candies** and **maccaroni** in **Moby-Dick,** I, 338 (Standard Edition): "Sea fowls are pecking at the small crabs, shellfish, and other sea candies and maccaroni."

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Effective June 15, the new address of the secretary (and consequently of the Newsletter) will be the Colorado State College of Education, Greeley, Colorado. Kindly send all communications to that address hereafter until further notice.

THE *Melville Society* NEWSLETTER IS PUBLISHED QUARTERLY FOR MEMBERS OF THE Melville Society, a group of literary scholars and others interested in the life and works of Herman Melville. The Society seeks to facilitate the exchange of information among its members, to stimulate the study of Melville's life and works, and to encourage literary, historical, and bibliographical research. Executive committee: Howard P. Vincent (1951), president; Willard Thorp (1952); Eleanor Melville Metcalf (1953); Merton M. Sealts (1954); William C. Gilman (1955). The annual membership fee of two dollars includes subscription to the Newsletter and other services. Address Tyrus Hillway, secretary, 423 Pequot Avenue, New London, Connecticut.